



Lewisburg Takes the Silver

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Introduction

For a community to compete in the global marketplace, and to retain its current businesses and to attract new businesses, it must develop and implement practices that keep pace with the trends and innovations of other communities. It must also seek to differentiate itself from its competitors. Community leaders must constantly study trends, innovations and best practices from the public and private sectors to maintain a competitive advantage.

From such study and self-assessment, the City of Lewisburg leaders discovered the trend of “sustainability” becoming increasingly important to businesses and communities. City leaders learned that sustainability has a direct correlation to economic and community development when practiced across its four main concepts – financial, human, social and natural. City leaders also learned that sustainability is increasingly becoming one of the essential components that site selection consultants and their clients consider when deciding where to expand or relocate their operations.

According to Don Schjeldahl,

“Sustainability is on the cusp of becoming the new normal for successful business organizations and for economic developers. Economic developers can expect to see site selectors requiring that sustainability be part of the community value proposition with increasing frequency. To be competitive in the era of sustainability, economic developers will need to pursue highly collaborative, multi-disciplined, and multi-jurisdictional approaches to community readiness.”¹

Through self-assessment, Lewisburg's leaders realized that the community already practiced some aspects of sustainability without a clear objective to do so and with no means of verifying and marketing its sustainability practices to existing or potential businesses.

The opportunity to verify and market its efforts in sustainability came from a program developed and implemented by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) through its Valley Sustainable Communities program. The TVA program offered communities within the region to present their existing sustainability practices and plans in order to achieve a certification at one of three levels – platinum, gold and silver. The program required an application, formation of a committee, community assessment, a final report and presentation, and a community tour by TVA and their consulting firm, Boyette Strategic Advisors (BSA). Communities that met the criteria for one of the levels of sustainability would then receive certification by TVA. Achieving certification at any of the levels would provide a community a method to maintain existing sustainability practices and to plan for future sustainability practices. Certification also provided a community a means of marketing its achievements in sustainability through the marketing arm of TVA. Lewisburg generated its own media attention, as well, by way of press releases, acknowledgement on online site selection maps web pages^{2 3 4} and certification seal attached to printed materials about the community.

The Economic Development Department of the City of Lewisburg initiated the process to become a TVA Valley Sustainable Community to develop and implement a true sustainability plan of action and to further benefit from the marketing of its sustainability efforts. The process resulted in the City of Lewisburg achieving certification from TVA and BSA as a Silver Level Valley Sustainable Community.

Defining Sustainability

The term “sustainability” can be at once an all-encompassing concept of ideas and practices. It can also be broken down to a more fundamental level as one’s “capacity to endure.”⁵ Though the term emerged as one most associated with limiting one’s impact on the environment (the natural), it has since broadened to be used as a model of efficiency in business (the financial), as a model for cultivating more inclusive governance (the social) and as a model for nurturing individual growth and the subsequent contribution to the community as a whole (the human). To be considered as sustainable, a business, a government, a community or even single family unit can incorporate each of the four areas as its comprehensive sustainability program to limit its environmental impact to strengthen one’s overall “capacity to endure.”

As a community, led by government, consisting of people and businesses, charged with serving those people and businesses and blessed to be located in an environment of natural resources, the City of Lewisburg accepted the definition of sustainability that incorporates each of the four areas in engaging the project to become a certified TVA Valley Sustainable Community.

The Community

The City of Lewisburg is a rural town of 12,000 people that transformed its economy from mostly agricultural to more of an industrial-based economy with the emergence of the railroad. It has a town square center of mixed-use development including retail, residential and office spaces. Lewisburg is located nine miles from the Duck River where it receives its water supply and is located four miles from interstate 65 that provides an easy corridor to metropolitan areas such as Nashville, Tennessee and Huntsville, Alabama.

For the past century, Lewisburg enjoyed a strong industrial environment that originated with pencil factories due to the large growth of Red Cedar trees in the area. Deforestation soon depleted the trees and the pencil factories closed providing an early lesson in sustainability. The community survived by relying on its remaining agricultural assets until other forms of manufacturing arrived and grew into a foundation of automotive parts suppliers, aerospace, defense and computer electronics manufacturers, tool and die makers, food processors and corrugated product manufacturing. Lewisburg's reliance on manufacturing, the increasingly competitive global marketplace and technological innovations such as the rise of automation in manufacturing spurring wide-scale reductions in employee need make a plan of sustainability even more important today than when the last Red Cedar tree was cut from the neighboring hillsides.

The Organization

The City of Lewisburg utilizes several partners for its overall governance including its economic and community development planning and implementation. The partners include the City of Lewisburg Department of Economic Development, the Marshall County Joint Economic and Community Development Board, the Marshall County Chamber of Commerce and the Lewisburg Downtown Alliance. A series of boards and committees consisting of community leaders provide further support through one or more of the main four partners. From these partners, the City of Lewisburg Department of Economic Development formed a committee to begin the process to become a TVA Valley Sustainable Community.

The committee consists of the following:

- Lewisburg Mayor, Jim Bingham, who has a background in engineering and small business;
- Former Lewisburg Mayor, Barbara Woods, who has a background in education and chief initiator of the city's recycle program;
- JECDB Director, Mike Wiles, who has a background as Director of Human Resources for the largest manufacturer in the community;
- Community Volunteer, Lisa Jackson, who has a background in community development and small business ownership; and
- Me, Director of the Economic Development Department, with a background as editor of the local newspaper.

All but one member are Lewisburg natives and all have resided in Lewisburg for more than 35 years.

The first goal of the committee was to guide Lewisburg to become a TVA Valley Sustainable Community, and then use the process and assessment to continue developing a true sustainability plan of action for the government entities to consider and adopt.

The Process

The first order of business for the committee involved conducting an assessment of the community's existing sustainability practices in relation to one or more of the four aspects – the natural, financial, social and human. The TVA Valley Sustainable Community Assessment Guide provided a perfect template for the committee to follow in organizing its assessment information. Each committee member was delegated an area of concentration to gather and organize information such as government, business, education, parks and green spaces and

wellness. The information from each committee member was compiled and presented to TVA and BSA.

The exercise revealed that the community had indeed been engaging in acts of sustainability. For the natural, the city had developed a city-wide, single-stream recycling pick up program for both residents and businesses. The county had developed a regional recycling hub capable of collecting large containers of recyclable materials from manufacturers and the public school system. The county redeveloped an abandoned industrial building to house the recycling hub where the large containers of recyclables are sorted and the materials distributed to businesses that reuse the materials in manufacturing new products. The county also coordinated a volunteer effort to clean up sections of the Duck River annually and the city and county joined forces with local industries in the industrial park to conduct annual street-side and industrial property clean up. In addition, several improvements to the city's parks and greenway were developed and the city completed application to become a certified Tree City.

For the financial, the city instituted energy audits for all city-owned buildings resulting in minor upgrades to the facilities that returned savings in energy costs and maintenance. Audits conducted at the school buildings, for example, resulted in energy efficiency to the HVAC systems that returned over \$200,000 in annual energy cost savings. The Lewisburg Electric System, working with TVA, also partnered with local industries to conduct energy audits for their facilities at no cost which produced several measures that lowered their energy costs.

For the social, the city invited a group from Wyoming to conduct a four-day community assessment of Lewisburg. The Wyoming Group consisted of economic development professionals, city planners and business leaders from several states that had conducted similar

community assessments for communities of populations ranging from 50 to 50,000. The idea to invite them to conduct an assessment for Lewisburg came from a presentation given by the group's founder at the annual USDA Rural Development Conference.

The community assessment involved town hall meetings and interviews with various groups of citizens to help shape future planning for the community. From this exercise, other groups of community volunteers were identified including the Lewisburg Downtown Alliance, a group that assists in the stewardship of the community by meeting and exchanging ideas to be presented to the leaders in local government for consideration and implementation.

And for the human aspect, the city, county and civic groups initiated junior leadership boards and committees consisting of high school students that engage in programs to learn more about their community and provide them a voice in the future planning of the community. Marshall Medical Center partnered with the city and county to conduct free health screenings to employees of local government, local industries and businesses and to disadvantaged residents through an extended partnership with area churches. The Spot Lowe Technology Center, the vocational education center for middle and high school students in Lewisburg, partnered with the city and local industries to provide work-based training curriculum through the aid of industry donations of equipment, funding, partnership with the Tennessee College of Applied Technology and internships for high school students at local industries.

Taking these examples, along with more than 70 other policies and programs, the committee was able to present its findings to TVA and BSA to advance to the next step of the certification process. A final report detailing the existing sustainability programs was presented along with future plans to continue these programs and expand upon them. Once approved, the committee

hosted a visit of TVA and BSA personnel in Lewisburg to give its final presentation and conduct a community tour where examples presented in the reports were demonstrated.

As TVA and BSA reviewed the materials, the committee held a series of debriefing sessions to discuss its mistakes, its successes and the next steps should the certification level be awarded. The sessions resulted in the formation of a unified sustainability effort that grew to become the city's 20-year vision plan adopted by the Lewisburg City Council in the first quarter of 2014.

The Results

In the past, the City of Lewisburg and Marshall County, with their various boards and committees, held strategic planning sessions that too often did not achieve what was hoped. Reasons for the lack of productivity varied from weak leadership, disjointed messages and desires and poor planning procedures to more common issues such as a lack of proper funding mechanisms, conflicts of interest and no true commitment to progress. Beginning with the recycling program that spurred the initiative to become a TVA Valley Sustainable Community, the City of Lewisburg managed to bring together its leaders, its citizens and its businesses to develop and adopt a 20-year Vision Plan that incorporates all the aspects of a true sustainability program – the natural, financial, social and human.

The Vision Plan has concrete steps to be taken along with a reasonable amount of flexibility, benchmarking mechanisms and measures to insure participant accountability. It relies on the expertise of professional planners, Hodgson Douglas, The Kennon Calhoun Group and The Walker Collaborative, but it also involves the input and participation of local citizens, various local groups and agencies and local leaders in business and government. The Vision Plan has

focus – downtown, parks and green spaces and infrastructure – and it serves as a living template from which other areas of focus can be nurtured and developed.

Along with serving as a catalyst to the creation of the Vision Plan, achieving certification as a TVA Valley Sustainable Community afforded the City of Lewisburg additional methods of marketing to prospective companies, site selectors and visitors and residents. Previous marketing content consisted of the basics – location, workforce and the too often nebulous “quality of life.” Certainly, site certification programs create a stronger attractiveness for industrial location in a community such as the Select Tennessee site certification program by the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development or the Middle Tennessee Industrial Development Association Deal Ready site certification program. It should also be true that our certification as a TVA Valley Sustainable Community provides Lewisburg greater appeal as a community in which to do business.

The marketing benefits extend to include new mediums such as TVA’s heavily visited website, their marketing department press releases, BSA’s website and online newspapers⁶ from across the region. The City of Lewisburg increased its own exposure as a TVA Valley Sustainable Community through its social media (Blog, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram and Google+), the city website containing the TVA Valley Sustainable Community Silver Level seal,⁷ and the local newspaper online article⁸. All of these collaborative efforts had a large impact, even if somewhat unmeasurable, on our community’s marketing campaign.

Proof of the significance in becoming a TVA Valley Sustainable Community came recently in the acknowledgement by an existing industry in Lewisburg, a new industry that recently

relocated to Lewisburg and a prospective industry that has Lewisburg remaining as one of their final sites they are considering (ours is the only site remaining in Tennessee.)

Calsonic Kansei North America (CKNA) is Lewisburg's largest industrial employer with 1,200 employees. It has operated in Lewisburg for 30 years manufacturing parts for the automotive industry. In early 2014, Calsonic Kansei North America held its grand opening of a new 300,000 sq. ft. facility for warehousing and additional production capacity adjacent to its existing facility. The project created 526 new jobs and earned the company a Trade and Industry Magazine CiCi Award for Community Impact⁹.

During the grand opening celebration, CKNA Vice President of Sales, Matt Mulliniks, commented on some of the reasons the company choose to expand its operations in Lewisburg.

“CKNA has made a commitment to sustainability as a core company value,” said Mulliniks. “Our achieving Zero-Landfill status at our Lewisburg facility is just one example of how CKNA is committed to sustainability. We are proud that the City of Lewisburg shares this commitment having been recently named a Tennessee Valley Authority Valley Sustainable Community at the Silver Level.”

Mulliniks furthered his and the company's recognition of the sustainability certification by offering a \$100,000 donation to the Friends of Lewisburg Parks to help fund a series of improvements to Rock Creek Park including underground utilities and tiered seating in the hillside of the park for events¹⁰.

Meiwa Industry North America is a Japanese automotive parts supplier that manufactures trunk linings and interior linings for Toyota, Nissan, Honda and Mitsubishi. In April of 2014, the company held its ground opening of its first North American facility in the I-65 Commerce Park

in Lewisburg. The Economic Development Department of the City of Lewisburg competed for Meiwa with several other communities in Tennessee and the southeast region during most of 2013. The selection process for the company coincided with the city's approval for certification as a TVA Valley Sustainable Community in the late summer of 2013. From that point, Lewisburg advanced in the company's selection process to become one of five remaining potential locations for the company's first North American operation. It was during a final site visit with the company that the ED Department's presentation was able to officially announce its certification in sustainability.

The announcement of the certification sparked discussions with the company's executives on what the certification meant. The ED Department then relayed the process involved and the factors which received a positive response from the company's executives.

As translated by the company's translator, Miho Kobayashi, Meiwa North American President, Takahiro Hasegawa said, "This is a very important concept for our company as well. We are pleased to hear your city embraces this philosophy."

Coincidentally, the company formally announced to community leaders that it had chosen Lewisburg for its first North American facility location the same week that TVA held its Valley Sustainable Community awards ceremony in December 2013.

There is a confidential European auto parts manufacturer currently conducting a site search in the Southeastern U.S. Lewisburg remains as the final Tennessee community under consideration and one of three in the southeast.

During a recent site visit, the ED Department for the City of Lewisburg provided information on its certification as a TVA Valley Sustainable community. As before, an executive with the

company requested more information on the meaning of the certification. Once explained, the executives each nodded their understanding and appreciation followed by only one comment from the company's president, "Very good."

Conclusion

The process to achieve TVA Valley Sustainable Community certification and the actual achievement itself served the City of Lewisburg and its local leadership partners in several ways. First, the process helped to create a true sustainability plan of action with the development and ongoing implementation of the 20-year Vision Plan for the City of Lewisburg. Second, the process provided a template for future planning strategy sessions by bringing together government, businesses and the citizens of Lewisburg in a successful demonstration of real partnership where a goal was created and achieved. Third, the achievement itself gave Lewisburg a positive presence in several media publications amounting to a free marketing campaign as a community to be considered by prospective industries, businesses and residents. Fourth, the achievement earned the City of Lewisburg recognition and appreciation from existing industries and even helped to lead to a donation from one of them toward a sustainability project in the community. Lastly, the achievement appears to have played a role in a new industry choosing Lewisburg for its new location and it may even be playing a role today in the potential recruitment of yet another new industry for Lewisburg.

It can only be concluded then that the process to certification and the certification itself for the City of Lewisburg as a TVA Valley Sustainable Community at the Silver Level has made the community better, its competitiveness to attract new businesses greater, its ability to retain existing businesses more manageable, and its "capacity to endure" stronger.

Reference Pages

- (1) – “The Coming Era of Sustainability” for the IEDC Economic Development Journal, Volume 12/Number 4/Fall 2013, Don Schjeldahl – author
- (2) – Link to TVA Webpage Acknowledging Lewisburg as a Silver Level Valley Sustainable Community - <http://www.tvaed.com/sustainability.htm>
- (3) - Link to TVASites.com Lewisburg Page displaying Lewisburg as “Sustainable Community” - <http://tvasites.com/InSitelocal.aspx?searchArea=FeaturedProperties&Local=lewis>
- (4) – Link to Lewisburg Blog with Press Release on Lewisburg Receiving Sustainable Community Designation - <http://www.lewisburgtnecd.blogspot.com/search?updated-min=2013-01-01T00:00:00-06:00&updated-max=2014-01-01T00:00:00-06:00&max-results=35>
- (5) – Link to webpage on Sustainability that defines the term as - *Among the many ways that sustainability has been defined, the simplest and most fundamental is: "the ability to sustain" or, put another way, "the capacity to endure."* <http://www.sustainability.com/sustainability>
- (6) – Link to website article in the Chattanooga - <http://www.chattanooga.com/2014/4/21/274814/More-TVA-Communities-Seek-Sustainable.aspx>
- (7) – Link to City of Lewisburg Website containing TVA Valley Sustainable Community Seal - <http://www.lewisburgtn.gov/>
- (8) – Link to Marshall County Tribune article on Lewisburg’s Certification - <http://www.marshalltribune.com/story/2031818.html>

(9) – Link to Trade and Industry Magazine CiCi Awards that includes CKNA recognition -

<http://www.tradeandindustrydev.com/tid/cici-awards/tids-cici-awards-community-impact-category-2014-8932>

(10) - Link to Article on CKNA Donation to Rock Creek Park -

<http://www.marshalltribune.com/story/2116954.html>